

**The Mennonite Faith.**

The following comments upon the Faith of the Mennonite Church are copied from the report of the Missouri Conference of that church, held September 27th.

**Church Ordinances** were considered by the conference in a number of short addresses, because it was thought necessary to give expression to our views on this subject that there might be unity in our manner of teaching the ordinances. Man believes, God regenerates; men keep ordinances, God fulfills their meaning. Once man has come to God and found adoption into the divine family, he in loving obedience keeps the ordinances to have first "the answer of a good conscience toward God" in himself, and next to show to the world by these ordinances the working of God, and the character of the religion he has accepted.

Baptism was discussed as to its meaning and use, and mode as practiced by us. By our obedience to baptism we receive "the answer of a good conscience" as the apostle teaches, but it is also a figure upon what God does for us, or a shadow that is cast by the one great *saving baptism*. As God gave Moses the figure of the tabernacle, revealing to him the form of the sanctuary, so God has given water baptism to the believers on Jesus as a figure. It is an outward sign to point both the recipient and the beholder to the God-given baptism of the Holy Ghost. Acts 11:16; Mark 1:8.

By water baptism the child of God expresses his adoption into the family of God. The adoption actual is the work of God, but the convert desires the world to know that he has now chosen to live for God, and to be united with his people, and water baptism is his sign that he will live no longer in sin. Rom. 6:2, 3. The baptism of John was figurative, Matt. 3:11, and ours is still figurative, 1 Peter 3:21.

Baptism as presented in Rom. 6:3, 4 and Colossians 2:12 we understand to be a reference to the death of the old man of our first nature, and his burial out of sight with his deeds that we may no longer live in sin. These scriptures, with a number of verses preceding and following, we believe to have reference to a spiritual work throughout. We cannot be consistent and literalize a part and spiritualize a part, so we conclude that baptism into death, burial, planting together, circumcision, crucifixion, etc., have not reference to any literal act of man, but rather to a spiritual work. The passage in Colossians 2 is especially clear in this respect. In verse 11 the apostle says, "Ye are circumcised with a circumcision *made without hands*." "Buried with him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with him *through the faith of the operation of God*."

The communion with bread and wine is a remembrance of the suffering and death of the Lamb of God which was the antitype of the paschal lamb offered by the Jews, year by year, in remembrance of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Feet-washing we feel ourselves bound to keep in loving obedience to God. It shows humility. Feet-washing is a figure to show the relation of the brotherhood one toward another. As Christ gave the example, being Lord and Master—greater than his disciples, he showed them that there should be among them neither a spirit of aspiration to greatness, nor an aim at distinction in position to be exalted and above another. By this solemn exercise the church and the world have before them a lesson which teaches that the church is a brotherhood standing on the same level.

**Non-conformity** to the world embraces all our actions and ways in life, where evil results in any way from being conformed to the ways of the world, or where this conformity is only from a desire to be like and to please the world. When we consider the abominations of the world in the matter of apparel as it is now practiced, and by many calling themselves Christians, we conclude that more unrighteousness, and evil in a multitude of ways results from fashionable dress than almost any other way. It destroys purity, integrity, honor, and health, bringing destruction upon the soul and ruin and death upon the body. The fascination of worldly conformity when the mind becomes intoxicated with it in worldly pleasures is illustrated in the case of Herod's

foolish promise to the daughter of Herodias when she danced before him. It in this case cost the head of John the Baptist.

**Apparel** for Christians should be neat and beautiful, in good taste, yet simple and plain, "as becometh people professing godliness." Our brethren, as well as the sisters, should put on apparel that does not hide away the fact that we are to be "living epistles, known and read of all men."

Conforming to the world in attending its places of amusement is disastrous to purity of thought and life and communion with God. Those who attend improper amusements of any kind, and pay their money for them, become partakers of their evils. Paying for entrance to fairs as they are now generally held, we help to pay for the gambling and many immoral ways of making money that are practiced there, the cruelty to animals in the races, etc. Going to the theatre, circus, etc., cultivates a love of vanity, humor, vulgarity, etc., that leads the soul away from God.

It is the sense of this conference that all *secret organizations*, such as were in existence years ago, Masonry, Oddfellowship, etc.; more recently the Grange, and later still Knights of Labor Unions, Temperance (secret) Societies, etc., are not in harmony with the Gospel as we understand it. As Christians it is our duty to stand aloof from them, and to labor for all the good that might be done in any or all secret organization by being true to God in the one organization that he has made through Christ in the form of *The Church*.

**Oaths.** We feel it our duty to repeat our entreaties, through this conference, to the brotherhood of this state to avoid, on every occasion and under all circumstances, taking an oath. The Savior has forbidden it when he says, "swear not at all." The apostle James writes in 'perfect harmony with the words of the Lord when he says, "Above all things, my brethren, swear not," and the whole New Testament Scriptures presents such a truthful, pure character for the Christian that it is impossible to add force to his words by an oath.

**Anointing the Sick.** As the apostle James in his epistle to the church in general says, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up," we believe that it is the will of God that his instructions in this case as well as his other teachings should be observed by the church for all time. We cannot understand that this teaching of James can be spiritualized any more readily than Paul's command that the "women adorn themselves in modest apparel." We believe it to be our duty to offer the prayer of faith accompanied with the anointing with oil for the healing of the sick. We do not, however, consider that there is any healing virtue in the oil, but that we should use it in connection with prayer to give exercise to our faith. We consider that the anointing and prayer are for the healing of the body, and not for a blessing to, or a raising up of the soul after death, as is believed by some who practice the anointing with oil.

**Evangelizing.** Whereas there are many places in Missouri and other western States where a few of our members have settled and have no church organization, and we see verified the words of our Savior, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few." Therefore this conference uses this means of making an earnest appeal to the stronger churches throughout the United States and Canada to make more effort to supply ministerial labor where it is needed in the western States.

As further reasons for this appeal we would state that many calls have been made to the ministers of this State, to hold meetings at various points, as there are persons there who believe the doctrine of the Bible as taught by the Mennonites, which calls could not under the circumstances be filled. The ministers here are few in number, their means are limited, and they have already about as much to do as they can attend to. The interests of the church must suffer here as they have already in the past unless some means can

be devised by which the faith as we have received it can be preached more extensively. We have been here contending for years for the doctrines of the Scriptures under great disadvantages, struggling against the opposition of the world, and even some hinderances by churches that do not understand us. Through all this we have labored to uphold our precious faith which was brought to us first by the suffering of our Lord, then the trials that awaited the first disciples, and later the persecution which was waged against our forefathers in the fifteenth century. We are convinced that our dear brethren in the strong churches cannot understand how great the field for labor here is, and how earnest and direct our efforts must be to maintain the faith which we so dearly love. It is with sad regrets that we see many of the children of our members lost to the church, many of whom we believe could be gained if the proper efforts were made. May the Lord put it into the hearts of many of our dear brethren to use their means, their time, their talent to spread the gospel over the wide field that is ripe to the harvest in these western States.

**The Apostolic Church a Brotherhood.**

"In the apostolic church preaching and teaching were not confined to a particular class, but every convert could proclaim the gospel to unbelievers, and every Christian who had the gift could pray and teach and exhort in the congregation. The New Testament knows no spiritual aristocracy or nobility, but calls all believers 'saints,' though many fell far short of their vocation. Nor does it recognize a special priesthood in distinction from the people, as mediating between God and the laity. It knows only one High Priest, Jesus Christ, and clearly teaches the universal priesthood, as well as the universal kingship, of believers. It does this in a far deeper and larger sense than the Old; in a sense, too, which even to this day is not fully realized. The *entire body of Christians* are called 'clergy,' a peculiar people, the heritage of God."

"On the other hand it is equally clear that there was in the apostolic church a *ministerial office*, instituted by Christ, for the very purpose of raising the mass of believers from infancy and pupillage to independent and immediate intercourse with God, to that prophetic, priestly, and kingly position, which in principle belongs to them all. Eph. iv. 11, 13."—*Philip Schaff: History of the Christian Church. Vol. II. pp. 124, 125.*

"In earlier times there was a grander faith. For the kingdom of God was a kingdom of priests. Not only the 'four and twenty elders, before the throne, but the innumerable souls of the sanctified upon whom 'the second death had no power,' were 'kings and priests unto God.' Only in that high sense was priesthood predicable of Christian men, for the shadow had passed; the reality had come; the one High Priest of Christianity was Christ."—*Hatch's Bampton Lectures on the Organization of the early Christian Churches. p. 139.*

"Are not we laymen priests also?" wrote Tertullian defending the rights of the people against the rising hierarchy. It is written: 'He hath made us kings and priests.' Rev. 1:6. It is the authority of the Church alone which has made a distinction between *clergy and laity*. Where there is no college of ministers, you administer the sacrament; you baptize; you are a priest for yourself alone. And where there are three of you, there is a church, though you be only laymen. For each one lives by his own faith, and there is no respect of persons with God."

DE EXHORT, CAST., C. 7.

I have seen beneath the microscope a seed three thousand years old start into instant germination when touched with a drop of warm water. So a human soul long apparently lifeless begins to grow when touched by the water of life.—*Canon Wilberforce.*

While the church of Christ has been gathering in not more than three millions of converts from the heathen world, the natural increase of that world has been twenty millions! Must not a tremendous advance be made somewhere along our lines of work?